



Jim Thorpe (Sac and Fox) 1887 - 1953

Describing Jim Thorpe as a great athlete would be doing him a severe injustice. A better description would be calling him the greatest athlete of the 20th Century. This label will probably be debated by many, but Thorpe's accomplishments speak louder than words. King Gustav V of Sweden told Thorpe: "Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world."

James Francis Thorpe was born on May 28, 1887 in a one-room cabin in Oklahoma. Although there is much confusion on Thorpe's date of birth, this is the date according to his estate. His very existence was an excellent representation of the melting pot that was America. He had some French and Irish blood but he was of mostly Sac and Fox Indian heritage. His Indian name, Wa-Tho-Huk, translated to "Bright Path", something that Thorpe definitely had ahead of him.

The career biography of Jim Thorpe reads like an encyclopedia of sports, encompassing virtually every major athletic event available. In the 1912 Olympic Games, he won both the pentathlon and decathlon events. In the same year, he led his Carlisle Indian School team to the national collegiate championship, scoring 25 touchdowns and 198 points. Following the college football season, Thorpe went on to play 6 years of Major League Baseball. Meanwhile, he managed to lead the Canton Bulldogs football team to unofficial world championships in 1916, 1917, and 1919. When he eventually finished his playing days in 1928 with the Chicago Cardinals, Jim Thorpe had become an athletic attraction that crowds flocked to see. Thorpe died on March 28, 1953.

In 1950, the nation's press selected Jim Thorpe as the most outstanding athlete of the first half of the 20th Century and in 1996-2001, he was awarded ABC's Wide World of Sports Athlete of the Century.